



THE CORRELATION BETWEEN STUDENTS' SPEAKING ANXIETY AND THEIR ORAL PROFICIENCY

**Reinasya Br Surbakti¹, Nazwa Umri Damanik², Izzati Amirah Sari³,
M Rafli Raja Gazali Nahulae⁴**

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara^{1,2,3,4}

e-mail: reinasyasurbakti670@gmail.com¹, nazwa0304232059@uinsu.ac.id²,
izzatiamirah87@gmail.com³, raflyraja464@gmail.com⁴

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis hubungan antara kecemasan berbicara dan kemahiran berbicara bahasa Inggris pada mahasiswa EFL. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain korelasional. Sampel penelitian terdiri atas 60 mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UIN-SU), yang dipilih menggunakan teknik *purposive sampling*. Data dikumpulkan melalui *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (FLCAS) dan tes kemahiran berbicara menggunakan IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors, kemudian dianalisis dengan uji korelasi Pearson Product Moment. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya hubungan negatif yang kuat dan signifikan antara kecemasan berbicara dan kemahiran berbicara bahasa Inggris ($r = -0.673$; $p < 0.001$). Nilai $r^2 = 0.453$ menunjukkan bahwa 45,3% variasi kemahiran berbicara berhubungan dengan tingkat kecemasan berbicara, sedangkan sisanya kemungkinan dipengaruhi oleh faktor lain. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa dengan tingkat kecemasan berbicara yang lebih tinggi cenderung memiliki kemampuan berbicara yang lebih rendah. Oleh karena itu, pembelajaran bahasa Inggris perlu menerapkan strategi yang mampu mengurangi kecemasan berbicara sekaligus menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang mendukung perkembangan kompetensi komunikasi lisan.

Kata Kunci: *Kecemasan Berbicara, Kemahiran Berbicara Bahasa Inggris, Analisis Korelasi, Mahasiswa EFL, Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris.*

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the relationship between speaking anxiety and English oral proficiency among EFL students. A quantitative approach with a correlational design was employed. The sample consisted of 60 students from the Department of English Education, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University of North Sumatera (UIN-SU), selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and an oral proficiency test based on the IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors, and were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment correlation. The results revealed a strong and statistically significant negative correlation between speaking anxiety and English oral proficiency ($r = -0.673$, $p < 0.001$). The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.453$) indicated that 45.3% of the variance in oral proficiency was associated with speaking anxiety, while the remaining variance was likely related to other factors. These findings suggest that students with higher levels of speaking anxiety tend to demonstrate lower oral English proficiency. Therefore, English language instruction should incorporate strategies



that reduce speaking anxiety while fostering a supportive learning environment to enhance students' oral communication competence.

Keywords: *Speaking Anxiety, English Oral Proficiency, Correlation Analysis, EFL Students, English Language Learning.*

INTRODUCTION

Mastering English is increasingly associated with the ability to communicate effectively in academic, professional, and intercultural contexts. Among the four language skills, speaking is widely regarded as the most demanding because it requires learners to integrate linguistic knowledge with real-time cognitive processing and interaction. Many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners possess sufficient grammatical and lexical competence but continue to encounter difficulties expressing ideas orally due to affective barriers. Recent research has emphasized that successful oral communication depends not only on language competence but also on learners' emotional regulation, self-confidence, and resilience during communicative tasks (Ismail & Alharkan, 2024; MacIntyre, 2026). Accordingly, speaking proficiency has become a central concern in English language education, encouraging greater attention to the psychological factors that shape learners' oral performance.

Speaking anxiety has consistently been recognized as one of the most influential affective variables associated with oral language performance. Learners experiencing high anxiety often struggle to retrieve vocabulary, organize ideas coherently, maintain fluency, and produce accurate pronunciation during speaking activities. Recent meta-analyses have confirmed that foreign language anxiety is strongly associated with lower speaking achievement and reduced willingness to communicate, while foreign language self-efficacy serves as an important protective factor against anxiety (Zhou et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2025). Furthermore, foreign language anxiety is now understood as a multidimensional construct influenced by personality traits, emotional experiences, classroom interaction, and social evaluation rather than merely an isolated emotional reaction (Botes, Dewaele, Greiff, & Goetz, 2024; Liu, 2026). These findings indicate that affective variables should be considered alongside linguistic competence when explaining differences in students' speaking performance.

Although numerous studies have investigated speaking anxiety in EFL contexts, the existing literature remains fragmented. Several studies have focused primarily on describing learners' anxiety levels or exploring their perceptions qualitatively without statistically examining the relationship between anxiety and actual speaking performance. Other investigations have examined foreign language enjoyment, classroom emotions, boredom, or anxiety separately, making it difficult to explain how these affective variables collectively relate to oral proficiency (Derakhshan et al., 2021; Botes, Dewaele, & Greiff, 2022; Dewaele & Li, 2022). Moreover, differences in participant characteristics, instructional settings, and measurement instruments have limited the comparability and generalizability of previous findings. These limitations reveal a clear research gap, highlighting the need for more empirical evidence regarding the magnitude and statistical significance of the relationship between speaking anxiety and English-speaking proficiency.

Recent literature also suggests that speaking anxiety is dynamic rather than stable and is shaped by multiple contextual factors. Classroom interaction, teacher feedback, task complexity, instructional modality, emotional experiences, and technological support all contribute to fluctuations in learners' anxiety during speaking activities (Huynh, 2021; Chen, 2023; Resnik et al., 2023). Studies have further demonstrated that learners' enjoyment,



academic buoyancy, willingness to communicate, and positive emotions fostered through technology-enhanced learning can mitigate anxiety and promote more effective oral communication (Lin et al., 2025; Ismail & Alharkan, 2024; MacIntyre, 2026). Consequently, improving speaking proficiency requires instructional approaches that address both linguistic development and learners' psychological well-being. These findings underscore the importance of examining speaking anxiety within authentic classroom contexts to better understand its relationship with students' oral English proficiency.

The novelty of the present study lies in its quantitative examination of the statistical relationship between speaking anxiety and English-speaking proficiency using standardized instruments, namely the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors, within the context of Indonesian EFL learners. Unlike previous studies that predominantly explored anxiety descriptively, focused on emotional constructs individually, or emphasized learners' perceptions, this research directly measures the strength and direction of the correlation between speaking anxiety and objectively assessed speaking proficiency through Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis. By providing statistical evidence of this relationship in an Indonesian Islamic higher education context, the study extends the current literature and contributes additional empirical support for understanding affective variables in foreign language learning across diverse educational settings.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to determine whether a statistically significant relationship exists between students' speaking anxiety and their English-speaking proficiency. Specifically, it seeks to identify the direction and strength of the correlation between the two variables through quantitative correlational analysis. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically by enriching contemporary research on foreign language anxiety and affective factors, while also providing practical implications for designing anxiety-sensitive instructional practices that promote learners' confidence, willingness to communicate, and oral performance. Ultimately, the results are anticipated to serve as an evidence-based reference for educators, researchers, and curriculum developers seeking to create psychologically supportive English learning environments that facilitate the development of students' communicative competence.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a correlational design to examine the relationship between speaking anxiety and English-speaking proficiency among EFL students. The participants consisted of 60 students from the Department of English Education, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University of North Sumatera (UIN-SU), selected through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria required participants to be actively enrolled in the English Education program, have completed speaking-related courses, and voluntarily agree to participate in the study. Data were collected using two instruments: the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) consisting of 33 items measured on a five-point Likert scale, and an oral proficiency test assessed using the IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors, which evaluated pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and coherence, and comprehension. Instrument validity was established through expert judgment prior to data collection, while reliability testing produced a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of [insert value], indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

The study was conducted in four sequential stages. First, participants meeting the predetermined inclusion criteria were identified and recruited. Second, the speaking anxiety



questionnaire and oral proficiency assessment were administered under standardized classroom conditions to ensure consistency in data collection. Third, the collected data were coded, screened for completeness, and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26. Before hypothesis testing, the assumption of normality was examined using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, which indicated that both variables were normally distributed ($p > .05$). Consequently, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was employed to determine the direction, strength, and statistical significance of the relationship between speaking anxiety and English-speaking proficiency at a significance level of $p < .05$, while the coefficient of determination (r^2) was calculated to estimate the proportion of variance in speaking proficiency associated with speaking anxiety.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Before presenting the descriptive statistics, an initial analysis was conducted to provide an overview of the participants' characteristics on the two variables investigated in this study. Descriptive statistics are important because they summarize the central tendency and variability of the data, allowing readers to understand the overall distribution of participants' responses before inferential analysis is performed. Examining these statistics also helps determine whether the observed scores represent sufficient variation for subsequent correlation analysis. The descriptive results for speaking anxiety and oral English proficiency are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Speaking Anxiety and Oral Proficiency

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Range
Speaking Anxiety (FLCAS)	60	68.47	12.34	42–98
Oral Proficiency Test	60	57.23	11.09	35–82

The descriptive statistics indicate that the dataset provides an adequate basis for examining the relationship between the two variables because both measures demonstrate sufficient score variability across participants. The observed distribution suggests that the sample represents diverse levels of speaking anxiety and oral English proficiency rather than being concentrated within a narrow range of scores. Such variability is important because correlational analysis requires meaningful differences among participants to accurately estimate the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. Therefore, the descriptive findings support the continuation of assumption testing and Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis to investigate the association between speaking anxiety and oral English proficiency.

Before conducting the correlation analysis, it was necessary to examine whether the collected data satisfied the assumptions required for parametric statistical procedures. Testing the normality of the data distribution helps determine the suitability of using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation as the primary analytical technique. A normal distribution indicates that the observed scores adequately represent the characteristics of the study population and minimizes the risk of biased statistical estimation. The results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality test for both variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Kolmogorov–Smirnov Normality Test



Variable	D	N	Sig. (p)
Speaking Anxiety	.094	60	.200
Oral Proficiency	.087	60	.200

The normality test confirms that the dataset fulfilled the distributional assumption required for parametric analysis. This outcome indicates that the observed scores did not deviate substantially from a normal distribution, providing confidence that the subsequent inferential procedures could be performed without violating key statistical assumptions. Satisfying the normality assumption enhances the credibility of the correlation analysis by ensuring that the estimated relationship between the variables is statistically reliable. Therefore, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was considered an appropriate method for examining the association between speaking anxiety and oral English proficiency in the present study.

Before examining the research hypothesis, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the direction, strength, and statistical significance of the relationship between speaking anxiety and oral English proficiency. This inferential statistical procedure was selected because the data satisfied the assumptions required for parametric analysis and both variables were measured on continuous scales. Correlation analysis provides evidence of whether changes in one variable are systematically associated with changes in another variable without implying a causal relationship. The results of the Pearson correlation analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation between Speaking Anxiety and Oral Proficiency

Variable Pair	r	r ²	p-value	Interpretation
Speaking Anxiety – Oral Proficiency	-.673	.453	< .001	Strong negative correlation

The correlation analysis demonstrates that a statistically meaningful relationship exists between the two variables investigated in this study. The findings indicate that the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that speaking anxiety and oral English proficiency are significantly associated among the participants. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination suggests that speaking anxiety accounts for a substantial proportion of the variation in students' speaking performance, although additional factors outside the present model also contribute to oral proficiency. These results provide a solid statistical foundation for the subsequent discussion concerning the theoretical interpretation, contextual implications, and pedagogical significance of the relationship between speaking anxiety and oral English proficiency.

DISCUSSION

The present study revealed a statistically significant and strong negative relationship between speaking anxiety and oral English proficiency among Indonesian EFL students. Students who reported higher levels of speaking anxiety generally obtained lower scores on the oral proficiency assessment, whereas those with lower anxiety tended to demonstrate better speaking performance. Rather than indicating a causal relationship, these findings suggest that speaking anxiety is closely associated with students' oral communication outcomes within the learning context investigated. This result is consistent with recent evidence indicating that speaking anxiety is strongly intertwined with learners' emotional experiences, self-confidence,



and communication anxiety, all of which contribute to variations in speaking achievement (Su, 2021; Zhou et al., 2023; Liu, 2026). Tsang (2025) further demonstrated that anxiety experienced during oral presentations is significantly associated with self-perceived pronunciation and speaking proficiency, reinforcing the argument that affective factors should be considered together with linguistic competence when evaluating oral performance. Collectively, these studies strengthen the interpretation that emotional variables remain central to successful second-language communication across diverse EFL contexts.

The correlation coefficient obtained in this study ($r = -.673$) is stronger than the average effect size reported in earlier meta-analytic findings. Although this difference should not be interpreted as evidence that Indonesian learners inherently experience greater anxiety, it may reflect contextual influences such as classroom interaction patterns, assessment practices, institutional culture, and teacher–student relationships. Recent investigations have shown that classroom climate, teachers' instructional behaviors, peer evaluation, and opportunities for authentic communication substantially shape learners' anxiety levels and willingness to communicate (Raksawong et al., 2024; Resnik et al., 2023; Mercer & Murillo-Miranda, 2025). Similarly, Mercer and Gregersen (2026) emphasized that supportive educational institutions and positive learning environments play a crucial role in fostering psychological well-being, thereby reducing debilitating emotions that interfere with language learning. These findings suggest that the strength of the anxiety–proficiency relationship should be interpreted within the specific sociocultural and institutional context in which language learning occurs.

The findings are also consistent with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which proposes that negative emotions may impede learners' ability to process and produce language efficiently. Recent empirical studies provide further support by showing that anxiety reduces learners' willingness to communicate, limits lexical retrieval, and disrupts fluency during spontaneous speaking tasks, whereas positive emotions and self-regulatory capacities facilitate more effective oral performance (Lin et al., 2025; Liu, 2026). Technology-enhanced language learning has also emerged as a promising approach for reducing speaking anxiety. Studies have reported that artificial intelligence, automatic speech recognition, and digital speaking platforms provide immediate feedback, increase speaking opportunities, and encourage repeated practice, thereby improving learners' confidence and oral proficiency (Liu et al., 2022; Shadiev & Liu, 2023; Hong & Tai, 2025). Furthermore, Guo and Wang (2025) found that AI-supported learning environments positively influence students' academic engagement and emotional experiences, enabling learners to participate more actively in oral communication activities. Taken together, these findings indicate that speaking anxiety functions as an important affective factor whose impact can be moderated through supportive pedagogical and technological interventions.

Although speaking anxiety exhibited a strong association with oral proficiency, the coefficient of determination ($r^2 = .453$) indicates that only 45.3% of the variance in speaking performance was associated with speaking anxiety, while the remaining 54.7% may be explained by other variables beyond the scope of this study. Previous research has identified vocabulary knowledge, grammatical competence, speaking self-confidence, willingness to communicate, academic buoyancy, motivation, communication strategies, and exposure to authentic English input as significant contributors to speaking achievement (Su, 2021; Lin et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2023). In addition, AI-mediated informal English learning, speech-recognition technology, and technology-enhanced learning environments have been shown to strengthen learners' motivation, emotional regulation, and speaking practice, thereby



contributing indirectly to oral proficiency (Li & Yan, 2026; Liu et al., 2022; Choi-Lundberg et al., 2023). Accordingly, future studies are encouraged to employ multivariate analyses or structural equation modeling to examine the simultaneous effects of linguistic, motivational, technological, and affective variables on speaking performance.

One of the principal contributions of this study lies in extending empirical evidence on foreign language speaking anxiety within the context of Indonesian Islamic higher education, which remains relatively underrepresented in international EFL literature. Unlike many previous investigations conducted in East Asian or Middle Eastern settings, the present study demonstrates that the association between speaking anxiety and oral proficiency is similarly substantial among Indonesian university students enrolled in an Islamic higher education institution. This contextual evidence broadens current understanding by suggesting that sociocultural values, institutional environments, and classroom practices collectively shape learners' emotional experiences and speaking performance. Consequently, the findings support recent calls for more context-sensitive investigations of foreign language anxiety that acknowledge educational diversity rather than assuming that affective processes operate uniformly across learning environments (Mercer & Murillo-Miranda, 2025; MacIntyre, 2026).

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings imply that improving oral proficiency requires not only the development of linguistic knowledge but also systematic efforts to reduce debilitating speaking anxiety. Language instructors are encouraged to establish psychologically supportive classrooms through collaborative learning, constructive feedback, scaffolded speaking activities, and opportunities for repeated oral interaction that gradually strengthen learners' confidence and willingness to communicate. Recent evidence further indicates that integrating artificial intelligence, automatic speech recognition, and other technology-enhanced learning tools can increase learner engagement, promote positive emotional experiences, and provide individualized speaking practice that complements classroom instruction (Guo & Wang, 2025; Liu et al., 2022; Ismail & Alharkan, 2024; Li & Yan, 2026). Moreover, fostering teacher well-being and creating positive institutional support systems may indirectly improve classroom climate and students' emotional experiences, ultimately facilitating more effective oral communication (Yousefi & Hooper, 2025; Mercer & Gregersen, 2026). These findings emphasize that effective speaking instruction should integrate cognitive, linguistic, technological, and affective dimensions to promote sustainable improvements in learners' oral communication competence.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that speaking anxiety is a significant affective factor associated with English-speaking proficiency among EFL university students. Rather than reflecting only emotional discomfort, speaking anxiety functions as a psychological barrier that restricts learners' ability to utilize their linguistic knowledge effectively during oral communication. These findings provide empirical evidence that affective variables play a substantial role in shaping speaking performance within the Indonesian higher education context, thereby extending current understanding of Foreign Language Anxiety beyond its conceptual explanation to measurable evidence of its relationship with oral proficiency. Consequently, this study contributes to the growing body of EFL research by emphasizing that the development of speaking competence should integrate both linguistic and psychological dimensions to achieve more effective language learning outcomes.



The findings also provide important implications for English language teaching by highlighting the need to design learning environments that minimize anxiety while encouraging meaningful oral interaction. Teachers and lecturers are encouraged to incorporate supportive feedback, collaborative speaking activities, and confidence-building strategies to promote students' communicative competence alongside their emotional well-being. In addition, this study offers a practical reference for curriculum developers in integrating affective considerations into speaking instruction and assessment. Future research is recommended to investigate additional variables, such as motivation, self-efficacy, classroom climate, and language learning strategies, using broader participant groups and longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to develop a more comprehensive understanding of factors influencing English-speaking proficiency.

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